

# The Dawn of Russian Youth Culture in the Post-Soviet Era: An Aesthetic Study on Gosha Rubchinskiy

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## Abstract

Gosha Rubchinskiy is internationally recognized as the most successful Russian fashion designer of the contemporary era. Born in 1984 in Soviet-era Moscow, he spent his childhood before and after “perestroika” and his youth during the turmoil of the post-Soviet era. After a career in fashion as a stylist for magazines and films, Rubchinskiy launched his first collection under his eponymous fashion label in 2008, and in the 2010s the expansion of his international brand took the global streetwear scene by storm. His style is based on the basic formats of streetwear, especially skater style, but what most typifies the brand is its consistent “Russian psyche,” including use of Soviet-era motifs. In this paper, among Rubchinskiy’s various creative activities, we focus on his runway collections and apparel designs to analyze this “Russianness” and how it is expressed in his work. I also examine the reasons why these seemingly local design sources and codes have transcended their limited community and been accepted into the global fashion scene, generating commercial success. Overall, the article places Rubchinskiy’s work in relation to the consciousness of a generation of Russian youth that, exposed to an open, global information society, has gone beyond the post-Soviet era as well as the national frame of Russia.

## Keywords

Gosha Rubchinskiy, Post-Soviet youth, Russian psyche, Streetwear

## 1 Introduction

At the time of writing this article (March 2022), the forces of the Russian Federation have fully invaded Ukraine and tried to besiege the capital city Kiev. Every day, images of Ukrainian cities that have become battlefields are being broadcast on television and the internet. Russian President Putin’s decision to invade shocked the international community, though was perhaps not entirely unforeseeable. The struggle for control of the Crimean Peninsula has long been a smoldering conflict and, more broadly, for the various countries comprising the “West,” Russia has remained an unfriendly and strange country even after the end of the Cold War. The former leading power of the East is now reasserting its presence around the world. It is currently a matter of debate, both within Russia and the wider international community, whether this is for national security concerns that Russia perceives to be necessary, or due to the vision of a paranoid leader who wants to regain global hegemony. Having passed from Imperial Russia to the Soviet Union, Russia experienced major changes and upheavals in its social system in a short period of time.

Furthermore, given the ethnic and regional diversity of Russia, geographically the largest country in the world, the reaction of the Russian people to the military invasion conducted by their country has also varied. While the international community generally perceives the war as an unforgivable act of Russian barbarism, public opinion polls within Russia show that the majority support the “special military operation.” However, it has also been shown that Russians’ perceptions of the war (or special military operation) differ greatly between generations. The results of a relevant poll are quoted below [Lord Ashcroft Polls 2022]:

Most Russians support the “special military operation” in Ukraine and have a favourable view of Vladimir Putin, but those aged 18-24 oppose the invasion and are more sceptical towards the Kremlin line. ... The poll of 1,007 Russians, conducted by telephone from a neighbouring state between 11 and 13 March, also finds that Russians most blame the US and NATO for the conflict, and believe Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk should be part of Russia. However, most say they are feeling the effect of sanctions, and nearly half say Russia’s reputation has been damaged in recent years. The findings include:

1. 76% said they supported the special military operation, with 57% doing so strongly. However, most (53%) said Ukraine seems to be resisting more strongly than they would have expected.  
[...]
2. 85% had a positive view of Vladimir Putin, and 88% of the Russian military. 85% also said they trust Russia’s current leadership to make the right decisions for the country, and 78% said they thought Putin had ordinary Russians’ interests at heart.  
[...]
3. Those aged 18-24 were the only group more likely to say they opposed the invasion (46%) than supported it (40%). They were much more likely than Russians in general to reject the argument that the invasion was needed to protect Russia or to demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine. A quarter said they had an unfavourable view of Putin (compared to 11% overall) and they were the only group more likely than not to see President Zelensky as Ukraine’s leader. More than half (54%) said they favoured withdrawing Russian forces from the country.

In his commentary on the poll results, Lord Ashcroft [2022] writes:

A poll from Russia comes with two obvious caveats. First, the Putin regime effectively controls what Russians see and hear about the “special military operation” in Ukraine. Second, with protests crushed and prison terms for spreading of “fake news” about the war, many might be cautious in talking about their views to a stranger. We also know, however, that a crisis can often prompt a surge of national loyalty. However, the survey suggests that Putin has managed to shape Russian opinion strongly in his favour - at least for the time being.

These intergenerational differences in perception are related to the ways in which people gather information and form opinions. For the younger generation of Russians born after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global information society is a given; they make full use of the internet and have fairly broad access to Western information sources. These young people who use social networking more freely represent a Russian generation that has come to have a new way of thinking and a new set of values. They actively seek the truth about the world, rather than—as in previous eras—simply following the guidelines of the state, working, and concentrating purely on their own personal lives. Their primary source of information also tends to be news on social media accessed via smartphones and PCs rather than news from traditional media such as newspapers and TV. As such, their access to information is faster, more detailed, and less subject to state and government control. On the internet and social networking sites, reports of inhumane attacks by the Russian military are instantly communicated worldwide, and the perception that they are unacceptable in terms of basic human morality also quickly develops across countries, before any position or decision can be adopted by the state. In areas other than politics and economics, the internet and social networking sites have transcended national and regional boundaries and created a sense of global solidarity and shared values among the younger generation of Russians. Although they live within Russia's unique historical and cultural background, this younger generation also belongs to a global environment and is now engaged in creative activities in various fields, while nonetheless maintaining its unique post-Soviet ideas and awareness. Among these young creators, this essay focuses on Gosha Rubchinskiy, who has made the most distinctive impact.

## 2 Gosha Rubchinskiy, the Standard-Bearer of the Post-Soviet Era

### 2.1 Outline

In the mid-2010s, fashion insiders and young people on the streets of Western countries discovered a freshness in the collections of Russian designer Gosha Rubchinskiy (Georgiy Aleksandrovich Rubchinskiy; Russian: Георгий Александрович Рубчинский; born 29 June 1984) and welcomed them with great enthusiasm. The designs were printed with Russian letters in Cyrillic, unreadable and unfamiliar to many, and included motifs such as Russian and Chinese flags, that had rarely been featured as elements in fashion designs. They also featured relics of the former Soviet Union such as historical documents and old photographs. These motifs were developed and communicated through the medium of streetwear, with a specific focus on skate style.

Since then, Rubchinskiy has become the best-known and most commercially successful Russian fashion designer in the world. He launched his eponymous brand Gosha Rubchinskiy (Russian: Гоша Рубчинский) in 2008; it debuted at Paris Fashion Week in 2015 and has had a major impact on streetwear and the fashion industry in Russia, Europe, the US, and East Asia, including Japan. Since 2012, Comme des Garçons has provided production and distribution support, and the brand presented a collection every season until Rubchinskiy announced

that he would stop working in the traditional format after the AW2018 collection. Since then, he has continued to work as a cross-disciplinary creator in the fields of fashion design, direction, photography, and film for several different brands.

In this paper, in addition to examining the appearance of Gosha Rubchinskiy's fashion collections, I will also analyze his design sources and how they relate to the consciousness and aesthetic expression of the new Russian generation. Until now, Rubchinskiy has been mentioned in reviews of his collections, while previous studies have focused on the Russian political context and sexuality; to the best of my knowledge, very little has been said about his mindset and methods as a fashion designer.<sup>1)</sup> This is because Rubchinskiy's work is based on an awareness that diverges from the conventional standards of evaluation that were widely used in fashion history until the 2000s, and that critics and journalists are accustomed to. This discussion of Rubchinskiy's activities will illuminate new trends in fashion design since the 2010s. Overall, in this paper, I identify Rubchinskiy's design methods and creative consciousness, which have greatly influenced fashion designers of his generation and created major new trends in global fashion design.

Incidentally, the references in this paper are mainly English-language previous studies, including a few articles about this designer, as well as web versions of journals and websites.

## 2.2 Expressions of the Russian psyche and heritage

The series of collections presented by "Gosha Rubchinskiy" as a fashion brand from 2008 (for SS2009) to 2018 consistently express "Russianness," although to varying degrees—sometimes subtly, sometimes in an exaggerated way—depending on the season. This includes typical motifs that symbolize the Soviet Union. In addition, the collections' modernity and connection to contemporary reality are informed by current Russian youth culture, especially the underground skate and rave scenes in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Rubchinskiy was born in the Soviet Union and his collections tell personal stories based on his own life and experiences, but these stories are widely shared by and generate a sympathetic response from his peers and younger generations. The stories are also part of a highly effective global and commercial design strategy that speaks of its locality and is conscious of the gaze of those outside the Russian cultural sphere. Rubchinskiy has said the following about Instagram as a global communication tool,<sup>2)</sup> especially for young people:

Instagram is fantastic. It brings people together. The news only teaches us to hate each other: the Chinese, the Russians, everyone. You see kids from Korea or Russia on Instagram and you realize they are actually nice and share the same attitude as you. Skaters in Paris recognize me and say that they support Russia and the kids. Instagram shows them how we really are. That's groundbreaking. You can follow people all over the world and you begin to see the reality of it all. [Neugebauer 2015]

The global post-2000s cultural situation, driven by the development of social networking and information technology, has seen the creation of a huge amount of content that appears

to return to, sample, or reconstruct the past. This has led to a significant trend in nostalgia in everything from fashion to music. Mukhina [2018] points to the rise of nostalgia for the Soviet Union in contemporary Russia, including among social networking communities. She points out that the image of the Soviet Union held by the younger generation of Russians who grew up after its collapse is diverse; she focuses in particular on ambivalent evaluations of the Soviet Union, which include both positive and negative aspects. Mukhina describes the process that led to the formation of such an image as follows:

The sources of information mentioned were memories of the older generation, movies, songs, historical literature, and historical programs. The younger generation internalizes the ideas of the older generation through their relationships with their parents and others. They also take the information obtained from the older generation's ideas, films, and books as a starting point, compare it to their own situation, and construct their own image of the Soviet era at a distance from the older generation's image. [Mukhina 2018]

With the development of information technology, the spatial limitations of culture and notions of the linear progression of time have collapsed; communication is now real-time and global, and everything is recorded in the media. Visual images, fashion, and music have become saturated, and references to past cultures and artworks have become the primary inspiration for creators. Instead of attempting to create something completely original that no one has seen before, creators have begun to use existing elements to create new contexts. Past cultures and creations are no longer perceived simply as "old," but rather as fresh and accessible to the younger generation receiving them. Well-known objects from previous generations have become retro or nostalgic, and are transformed to acquire new value through their fusion with the contemporary social context or with new technologies, even as their existing value remains assured.

Furthermore, thanks to the benefits of information technology, locality and local commodities are appreciated globally, in other cultural worlds for the novelty and difference of their expression. Gosha Rubchinskiy's creative work therefore became a commercial success against the backdrop of an era in which geographical and temporal constraints dissolved.

### 2.3 Rubchinskiy's creative motivation

While his work has been a commercial success, Rubchinskiy still feels a strong sense of solidarity and attachment to the younger generation of Russians, the so-called Post-Soviet Youth, born just before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Rubchinskiy's production activities are motivated by the desire to provide them with cultural support and appreciation.

The clothes he wishes to design are intended for these young people born after 1991, the first generation to grow up without the distinct political background of the Soviet period, and for young Russians whose values are closer to those of other young generations

worldwide. While the design sources contain elements that reaffirm or evoke a specific sense of Russian youth identity, they are strictly removed from their original context, evoking for some a longing for Russia's superpower status in a bygone era or for traditional notions of Russian masculinity; in some cases they simply exist as bizarre "motifs" without any clear reference. The diffusion of these design sources and the images derived from them through international sales channels has made Rubchinskiy's business a global success. These sources and images have been channeled through the medium of streetwear, a movement and style shared by young people all over the world. For non-Russian-speaking young people, the meaning of Cyrillic letters on a t-shirt is not of primary importance. What matters is that they are from an unfamiliar and strange country. Rubchinskiy says the following about the modern fashion business:

Quality and feelings were the things that mattered most in the past, today it is about an image and an accessible vision. People generally don't care about the fabrics or workmanship anymore. If they want something, they'll buy it anyway, no matter how it looks like on them, what counts is image. [Neugebauer 2015]

The question of whether to focus on the global fashion business or on creations for a limited community of young people, including those in Russia, seems to have recurred throughout Rubchinskiy's career. This question has been the psychological context for his development of multiple brands, commercial suspension of certain major brands, and diverse creative activities across various fields. Skate culture, especially the Moscow skate scene, provides an important formal element for Rubchinskiy's designs, and has greatly inspired his work. These elements are not associated with what used to be the main criteria for the fashion business, i.e., high-quality craftsmanship, luxurious materials, and creative formality. He describes his inspiration from skatewear as follows:

I like real things. When I start working on a new collection, I know that I don't want to do something weird or unnatural. Skaterwear needs to be comfy. Skaters have their own style, their own tricks, their own way of dressing. That makes this scene so interesting, that's why this scene inspires me. Their clothes are fashionable and comfy at the same time. [Neugebauer 2015]

Rubchinskiy's collections always have a street and skatewear base, to which he adds the Russian origin stories that most define his style. In what follows, I provide an overview of all his collections and their design sources, with a specific focus on the role played by the "Russian psyche" in each collection.





Photo 1 Gosha Rubchinskiy SS14, Photograph by Rubchinskiy

(From *DAZED*, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/17555/1/exclusive-gosha-rubchinskiy-ss14>)

### 3 Collection

#### 3.1 Rubchinskiy's first collection: "Evil Empire" SS2009

Rubchinskiy's first collection was a clear expression of his attitude as a designer. The theme of the collection was "Evil Empire," a phrase used by Ronald Reagan in a 1983 speech denouncing the Soviet Union as a totalitarian and expansionist state. This theme was an ironic statement about the situation of contemporary Russia, still perceived by the international community, especially the West, as a queer and strange country that has inherited the Soviet legacy. An iconic graphic in the collection is embroidered on a sweatshirt; it comprises AK-47 assault rifles, bears, a two-headed eagle (symbolically representing the Soviet Union and Russia), and the phrase "Evil Empire" written in Russian in a 90s death metal-style font. These elements, which cut across time periods, are composed in a way that suggests a national emblem. The theme was received as humorous at the time, but in 2022 it once again represents perceptions of Russia among NATO and the West. It is a play on the stereotypes which Russia's younger generation believes are associated with the country by the outside world. While the "evil" is highlighted by angry roaring bears and death metal fonts, its presentation—using a format employed by metal bands—is derived from Western culture. Other looks in this collection incorporate elements from hardcore and punk, with sweatshirts and face masks adorned with spikes. This collection is the first of a trilogy that represents the emergence of a new consciousness among Russian youth from the period before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, who have been influenced by Western culture.

Igor Mukhin (Игорь Мухин) is a photographer who captured the energy of Russian youth in the 1980s before the collapse of the Soviet Union, documenting the changing times firsthand. Mukhin published a book of these images, *I Saw Rock'n'Roll*, in 2016. The



**Photo 2 Backstage at the SS09 show, Photograph by Rubchinskiy**

(From *DAZED*, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/gallery/18040/2/gosha-rubchinskiy-archive-images>)

book captures Moscow's rock scene, especially the young people who were excited by the punk music that came from the West. In an article about his work, Mukhin describes his motivation as follows:

"At the time, we had no idea how the world looked beyond the Iron Curtain," Igor writes in a statement for the book's crowdfunding campaign. He explains that while Soviet youth could watch edited films in cinemas or pick up glitchy rock on radio stations like Voice of America or the BBC, "I felt that the time of 'change' had come, and I needed to go and shoot." [Manning 2016]

The article also discusses Mukhin's perceptions of the consciousness of Russian youth during this period:

Over the course of six years, Igor documented the Soviet Union's rumblings of rebellion, shooting Moscow's underground rock scene and the DIY street style it gave birth to. "In 1985, the World Festival of Youth and Students hit Moscow: the concerts, the gatherings, the faces, clothes, and the behavior of the guests were



**Photo 3 1985, Photograph by Mukhin**

(From *ON ART AND AESTHETICS*, <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2017/05/01/punk-rock-in-the-ussr-a-collection-from-the-80s-by-igor-mukhin/>)





Photo 4 1987, Photograph by Mukhin

(From *ON ART AND AESTHETICS*, <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2017/05/01/punk-rock-in-the-ussr-a-collection-from-the-80s-by-igor-mukhin/>)

remarkable. In a word, you could call it ‘freedom,’ ” Igor notes. (Manning 2016)

Thus, Rubchinskiy’s inspiration for his first collection came from the powerful energy and atmosphere of his early years, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the exuberant consciousness of the Russian youth of the time.

### 3.2 Before the Paris Fashion Week debut (SS2010-AW2014)

After the launch of his first collection, Rubchinskiy continued to present his collections intermittently in a variety of formats and media, including lookbooks and videos. Although they revealed a continuing awareness of Russia and the use of Russia-specific motifs, they were often understated and Russian elements were generally expressed outside the apparel design (such as in the background of a lookbook or through the settings of photographs). Major changes in taste were still seen from season to season during this period, showing an experimental creativity and the gradual manifestation of the designer’s interests that would inform later runway collections. Below is an overview of Rubchinskiy’s creations from this period.

In the SS2010 season, he added a unique element to American skate style by adding Russian language graphics to t-shirts and other items using the globally recognized flame logo from American skate magazine *Thrasher*. A lookbook titled “The Dawn” was also produced, but the Russian elements were limited to backgrounds (photos of Russian cities). Furthermore, during the following AW2010 season, “The Slave Collection,” an installation and film presented at London Fashion Week, featured Russian and American skateboarders, but contained almost no Russian visual elements. Rubchinskiy’s interest in this installation seemed to be entirely focused on the everyday lives, thoughts, expressions of the young models and contemporary Russian youth that appear in the film piece. In the SS and AW2013 lookbooks, there are no obvious symbols of Russia in the apparel itself, except for a few Cyrillic letters. In *Hero Magazine*, Rubchinskiy said of the AW2013 collection:

We used inspiration from modernist and avantgarde era artists like Rodchenko, Mayakovsky, and Kandinsky [for the collection]. They broke rules and showed something different. I think now we are in the same moment, we need to make a new revolution. I've also used some things related to 90s Russian club and subculture style, my favorite period, a time when new things happened here. [Rubchinskiy 2013]

Thus, the lookbooks and videos which comprise Rubchinskiy's work during this period primarily contain Russian elements in non-clothing shots and are represented by images of the works of artists who the designer describes as his inspiration. For example, the lookbook for the AW2014 season collection is titled "Epic Aces." The Russian elements here are almost entirely limited to the Cyrillic letters printed on sweatshirts, but they are also iconographic and not immediately identifiable as Russian. Here the designer's attention is not on exaggerating Russian identity, but on other aspects of contemporary youth in Moscow.

He says:

I like now that young kids from America and Russia look the same and have the same moods and hypes. This is all about it: this is the modern universal young man. [Hall 2014]

The collection was inspired by the style of New York skaters in the late 80s, a time when fashion and music became more prominent elements of skating; this movement was not a temporary trend, but rather formed a culture that has continued to this day. What Rubchinskiy expresses here is the global solidarity of the young generation who share the same atmosphere and passion through the common culture of skating, whether they live in Moscow, New York, Seoul, or Tokyo.

### 3.3 Rubchinskiy's runway shows (SS2015-AW2018)

#### 3.3.1 SS2015

SS2015 was the first collection Rubchinskiy presented on the runway during Paris Fashion Week. The theme was "arctica." One third of the vast Russian Federation falls



Photo 5 Flame logo t-shirt from the SS2010 collection  
(From *artterritory*, [https://artterritory.com/en/architecture\\_design--fashion/articles/18682-dont\\_say\\_hop/](https://artterritory.com/en/architecture_design--fashion/articles/18682-dont_say_hop/))

within the Arctic Circle, including Siberia. In this collection, the theme was sublimated into Rubchinskiy's personal narrative. The specific image of the Arctic Circle can be seen in some of the fur garments, but the base of the collection is still streetwear and skater style. For this collection, Rubchinskiy created a "sunrise" graphic inspired by the Pomors, an ethnic minority group in northern Russia, which appears on caps and shoes. An important role in this collection is played by the artwork of Timur Novikov (1958-2002; born in Leningrad, USSR, a Russian artist, designer, art theorist, philosopher, and musician) whom Rubchinskiy admires. Novikov is known for his use of vibrant fabric compositions, and his work seems to be a key source of inspiration for the collection's signature patchwork of colored surface compositions on the backs of tops (A collection of apparel using Novikov's artwork, which more clearly evokes the Siberian landscape, was planned as a capsule collection for Dover Street Market).



**Photo 6** From the collection featuring prints by Novikov  
(From *CLASH*, <https://www.clashmusic.com/fashion/gosha-rubchinskiy-x-timur-novikov/>)



**Photo 7** Artwork by Novikov  
(Photograph by Fujisawa, Feb 24, 2018)

### 3.3.2 AW2015

The theme of this collection is sports. The word appears as a graphic in Cyrillic and Kanji characters on various items throughout the collection. However, although combinations of sweatshirts, pants, and loose-fitting pants can be seen in some of the designs, they are mostly casual styles consisting of relatively basic items rather than sportswear, and the theme is used more in a conceptual way (A strong athletic taste and heavy use of sportswear are more evident in the later collections). Furthermore, there are striking graphics using the Russian and Chinese flags, which can be seen as a kind of parody.<sup>3)</sup> The bottoms are styled in the "гопник"<sup>4)</sup> style, in which the hems of the pants are inserted into the socks.

### 3.3.3 SS2016

The theme of this collection is “ГОТОВ К ТРУДУ И ОБОРОНЕ (Ready for Labour and Defence of the USSR),” commonly known as “ГТО”, i.e., “all-union physical culture training program,” which is linked to the goals of physical education in Soviet society. The main component of this collection is sportswear, especially track jackets, athletic shorts, and tank tops reminiscent of gymnastics uniforms. Items featuring the Soviet and Russian flags are also featured. The year “1984”—Rubchinskiy’s birth year—is used as a graphic on some items, representing both a nostalgic reference to the era in which the designer was born and George Orwell’s novel 1984. Thus, it seems to function as an ironic reference to the totalitarian and managerialist ideas depicted in Orwell’s novel, and the critical attitude of the Western world towards them. In addition to this symbolization of communism



Photo 8 A parody graphic from AW2015 lookbook  
(From *PAUSE*, <https://pausemag.co.uk/2015/09/gosha-rubchinskiy-fallwinter-2015-lookbook/>)



Photo 9 Gosha Rubchinskiy SS16

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2016-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#1>)



Photo 10 Gosha Rubchinskiy SS16

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2016-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#21>)



and dystopia, the comically exaggerated personal belongings of workers and communism such as stars, gears, red flags, and a hammer and sickle (which appear towards the end of the show) seem to ironically express the image of the Soviet Union as seen from the outside.

### 3.3.4 AW2016

The theme of this collection, “СПАСИ И СОХРАНИ (Save and Protect),” refers to a common prayer in the Russian Orthodox Church which is often engraved on vessels with religious connotations, such as crosses. A distinctive element of this collection is the punk style (in Russia, Moscow and Leningrad were the Russian centers of rock music, including punk, since before the collapse of the Soviet Union). This is clearly expressed in the colorful and mohawk hairstyles of the models. However, unlike the London punks of the 1970s, who expressed their anti-establishment and anti-nationalist rebellious spirit in graphics and in the lyrics of ironically titled songs like “God Save the Queen,”<sup>5)</sup> the style is derived from the commercialized, “fashion-ized,” and somewhat “moralized” American punk scene (in which the young people were known as “kids”). In addition to punks, the collection features looks inspired by skins and bikers. The collection communicates the mixed atmosphere of conservative and progressive outlooks from the period before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which characterized the designer’s boyhood.

As Rubchinskiy said in an interview, his creations are inspired by “the relationship between Russian religion and the Russian soul.” The contrast between the punk style favored by the Russian youth and the message of traditional Russian Orthodoxy seems to suggest the flexibility and tolerance of this generation, which allows heterogenous and contradictory concepts and ideas to coexist.

### 3.3.5 SS2017

This collection, with a strong focus on sportswear, was presented in Florence, Italy, with Rubchinskiy as an invited designer of Pitti Immagine Uomo.<sup>6)</sup> The show was set in a defunct Soviet-inspired tobacco factory outside of Florence. A characteristic element of this collection is its collaboration with Italian sports brands such as FILA, Sergio Tacchini, and Kappa. At first glance, the styling appears to be careless and to



**Photo 11 Backstage at Gosha Rubchinskiy AW16,  
Photograph by Tom Emmerson**

(From *DAZED*, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/gallery/21405/1/gosha-rubchinskiy-aw16-by-tom-emmerson>)



prioritize functionality, suggesting an Italian version of the gopnik style. However, the show opened with tailored styles in matching tops and bottoms that paid homage to the traditional Pitti event.



Photo 12 Gosha Rubchinskiy SS17, Photograph by Giovanni Giannoni

(From *STYLE*, <https://www.scmp.com/magazines/style/article/1976164/pitti-journal-day-2>)

### 3.3.6 AW2017

This collection was presented in the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, which was once German territory before the Soviet occupation in World War II. Rubchinskiy describes the location of the show as follows:

If you think about Russia you think about politics. It's more interesting for me to invite you here and show you what Russia is rather than showing you in Paris. [Madsen 2017]

The motif of this collection was, as the designer himself says, to constitute the whole of the collection through a mixture of “the cultures of English football fans and German sportswear and Russian skate kids.” He explains the intention of the collection as follows:

For me, it's my mission: I'm Russian and I have a voice. I can speak about my country and invite my friends from the international press here, ... I just want to show my point of view. I don't want to teach people. I only want to show them what I like. If you like it, we can share. [Madsen 2017]

In his creative work, Rubchinskiy has never explicitly expressed a political stance

regarding Russia. He neither praises nor criticizes Russia, but only talks about himself and his relationship with his community. The goal is to tell the story of Russia from his own point of view, in apparel and other forms, and to share it with others.



Photo 13 Gosha Rubchinskiy AW17

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#7>)



Photo 14 Gosha Rubchinskiy AW17

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2017-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#19>)

### 3.3.7 SS2018

This collection was inspired by football and rave culture against the background of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, held in Russia. In addition to a collaboration with Adidas, a nationally popular sports brand, there was also a notable collaboration with Burberry, offering a fresh take on the traditional British brand from a unique streetwear perspective. The collection used even more vivid colors than previous collections, especially neon colors and tie-dye styling, recalling rave culture. The collection was conscious of the rave culture that originated in the UK, especially the style of the early 90s, and also Rubchinskiy's major role in the contemporary Moscow and St. Petersburg-based rave revival. Rubchinskiy is one of the primary supporters of this scene, holding cutting-edge events which include experimental spaces and music. The main theme of this collection seemed to be the enthusiasm of the young people gathering in Russia's progressive underground scene.

### 3.3.8 AW2018

This was his final collection, and was also developed based on a collaboration with Adidas. The German brand is a national favorite in Russia and was a symbol of aspiration under the



**Photo 15 Gosha Rubchinskiy & Burberry have collaborated on AW17**

(From *HYPEBEAST*, <https://hypebeast.com/2017/6/gosha-rubchinskiy-burberry-2018-spring-summer-collaboration>)



**Photo 16 Gosha Rubchinskiy AW17**

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2018-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#7>)

Cold War-era restrictions on goods. It has been used in the typical “gopnik (гопник)” style ever since the company designed the uniforms for the Soviet athletes at the 1980 Moscow Olympics. Accordingly, the current artistic director of Balenciaga and founder of Vetements, Demna Gvasalia (born in Georgia, formerly in the Soviet Union), says: “I always wanted to use three stripes and the logo, to be very honest with you. As a seven-year-old kid, I had an Adidas tracksuit, and that was my biggest fashion moment when I was a child.”

Gvasalia revived the story of the Soviet “Adidas of my dreams” in a SS2023 collection for one of the leading, long-established fashion houses, Balenciaga. Perhaps Rubchinskiy, who collaborated with Adidas before Gvasalia (or even Lotta Volkova<sup>7)</sup>), may have had a similar experience. At the very least, they would likely share a similar appreciation for and sense of the value of the Adidas brand:

Volkova and Rubchinskiy, both born in the same year and sharing the same subcultural interests and influences, presented visual references at once enchanting and unfamiliar to Western consumers: Orthodox Christian churches and the gritty street corners and tower blocks of Russia’s urban landscape. At Volkova’s hand, Rubchinskiy garments acquired the eclectic complexity of both East and West and became a tool for identity among an emerging generation. [Fedorova 2019]





**Photo 17 Gosha Rubchinskiy AW18**

(From *VOGUE*, <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-2018-menswear/gosha-rubchinskiy/slideshow/collection#11>)



**Photo 18 Balenciaga Resort 2023 by Demna Gvasalia**  
(From *WWD*, <https://www.wwd.com/runway/resort-2023/new-york/balenciaga/review/>)



**Photo 19 Adidas collaborated with Lotta Volkova in 2020**

(From *Design & Culture by ED*, <https://designandculturebyed.com/2020/08/07/adidas-x-lotta-volkova/>)

Demna Gvasalia used his close friend Rubchinskiy as a model for his Vetements show in the SS2016 season. Without question, the 2010s saw these former Soviet creators enter the mainstream of global fashion.

Rubchinskiy's AW2018 collection continued with looks from the Burberry collaboration. It featured classic elements, such as trench coats and Burberry checks, arranged with a change in pattern pitch and pattern-on-pattern styling, creating items that reveal a greater affinity with streetwear. There were also football-inspired looks including uniforms, which refer to the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. In addition, there were patchwork items in a collaboration with Levi's. Levi's jeans were also a brand that symbolized the longing for the West during the Soviet era. The collection also featured military looks such as camouflage patterns and military uniforms that suggest nationalism, including the flags of Russia, the US, and Japan (a large market for the brand). Thus, in the looks of his last collection, the motifs and elements that Rubchinskiy has used in the past are incorporated in a more accessible way and reinterpreted with a strong commercial edge.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

### 4.1 Summary

As we have seen, elements and motifs relating to Russia, skate style, and the underground scene—with which the designer is personally familiar—are visually important to Rubchinskiy's creations, but they do not have any special value in isolation. Rather, they only have value as part of his fashion designs when they are both organically connected to the story he is telling and shared with the community. It is exactly this lack of material certainty and presence of seemingly elusive emotional elements that make fashion possible.

Rubchinskiy, one of the most important fashion designers of the 2010s, is not defined by the traditional high-mindedness, elegance, ingenuity, and craftsmanship that has been glorified in fashion history. For fashion design in the 2010s and beyond, what is needed is subtle but recognizable product differences and a fresh and relatable story that allows such differences to be understood as significantly novel. By using such methods, Rubchinskiy showed us a new way of thinking about fashion design in the 2010s.

### 4.2 Methods of designing "fashion"

Below, I describe how an innovative fashion design approach, driven by Rubchinskiy, has given rise to a major trend in the 2010s. We would like to consider this point from a viewpoint of design methods as the new perspective.

The looks of Rubchinskiy's collections, which have made a striking impression on their audience, are in fact composed of a combination of already familiar existing elements and legacies of the past. The shapes, technical methods, and use of materials in individual items have already been seen generally. Rubchinskiy's fashion designs are based on widely recognized styles, namely contemporary streetwear with skate culture at its core. Rubchinskiy's use of basic items such as sweatshirts and tailored jackets, and his use of Burberry trench coats and Levi's jeans as prototypes for collaborations, are traditional in that they utilize globally recognized standards that seem to be necessary choices to realize the "correct design process" that Rubchinskiy intends. His take on fashion and the fashion



business is revealed in the following interview:

You need to give things a soul. Fashion itself is nothing. Luxury is in the eye of the beholder and you can make it. The right story turns even a beer bottle into a luxurious item, so that you want it and you would die for it. Whatever it is: the product itself is not important. A Supreme sweater can be as desirable as a Chanel dress. [Neugebauer 2015]

What we want to emphasize here is that Rubchinskiy's designs produce not so much material objects, i.e. clothing or other items as products, but rather more emotional and spiritual objects that guide the consciousness of the community that receives them. Combined within the streetwear format are elements that evoke the public image and common perceptions of Russia. The most effective elements are those with strong symbolism, such as, as we have seen, the Russian and Soviet flags and Cyrillic script, nationalistic looks of exaggerated masculinity, elements of military uniform, hooliganism, and sportswear. These are the elements that differ from and add emotional stories to existing streetwear. The success or failure of these combinations as commercial designs is determined by the presence or absence, or the strength or weakness, of any identification from the community in response. This identification can be nostalgia for an era one has never experienced, a longing for an unfamiliar culture, or a sensation of freshness. An adherence to authentic history or material certainty is not necessarily important.

Since its debut at Paris Fashion week, and with the support of Comme des Garçons, Rubchinskiy's brand has gained a stronger global presence and a larger market. The key to the brand's recognition and commercial success has been to simultaneously fulfill the values shared by today's youth across countries and regions, and to tell the story of a Russian designer expressing the unique locality of Russia. Rubchinskiy and his marketing team are well aware of this, and have shifted to a more straightforward, even ostentatious, representation:

In the late 80s and beginning of the 90s, fashion was like a dream world, not far from being contemporary art. Designers like Rei Kawakubo and Martin Margiela were like artists, they really created something. Surely they inspired Raf and other designers, if not awakened their interest in fashion to begin with. But we live in different times today. Streetwear is everywhere and fashion has become very commercial. [Neugebauer 2015]

Rubchinskiy's streetwear opens the door to a new set of values, different from the highly creative mode of fashion or its refined and sophisticated looks. It is somewhat wild, unpolished, contains elements of the bizarre, yet is functional, everyday, and allows you to live your own story. This sense of style has spread around the world as a new and fresh aesthetic that is distinct from both the history of clothing and from existing streetwear. This fresh element introduced by Rubchinskiy—together with Gvasalia, Volkova, and other post-Soviet creators of the same generation—has created a ground swell of activity in mainstream

streetwear.

The sunrise design and the slogan PACCBET<sup>8)</sup> which Rubchinskiy has often used throughout his career, symbolize the anticipation of the coming of a new era in the former Soviet Union and the emergence of a new consciousness in Russia in the post-Soviet era. At the same time, in the age of social networking and information technology, it seems to represent the consciousness of young people all over the world, full of hope for a new world, showing sympathy and solidarity.

#### 4.3 Future research

This article focused on Rubchinskiy's collections for his eponymous brand from 2008 to 2018, with little reference to his multiple other brands, collaborations, and projects. To get a fuller picture of Rubchinskiy's creative activities, it would be necessary to study these projects, as well as his work as a stylist, video creator, and photographer.

#### 〈Notes〉

- 1) The followings are the previous studies from the viewpoint of political context or sexuality: Engstom [2022] and Roberts [2017].
- 2) Rubchinskiy's account has about 380,000 followers. After the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, all of his posts were temporarily deleted except for a photo of a man lying on a desk.
- 3) A logo printed t-shirt of American clothing brand, Tommy Hilfiger, that is popular among young people all over the world.
- 4) A gopnik (гопник) is a member of a delinquent subculture in Russia, and in other former Soviet republics; a young man (or woman) of working-class background who usually lives in Russian suburban areas and comes from a family of poor education and income, including gangsters.
- 5) "God Save the Queen" is a song by the Sex Pistols, released in 1977.
- 6) Pitti Immagine Uomo (in English, "Pitti Men"), is one of the world's most important platforms for men's fashion. It is held twice yearly in Florence.
- 7) Lotta Volkova is a stylist and consultant who has styled Gosha Rubchinskiy, Vetements, and Balenciaga. She was born in Vladivostok, Russia, in the Soviet era.
- 8) Paccbet is the Russian word for sunrise or dawn, and has come to be a metaphor for change and the promise of better days. Gosha's work has always focused on what it means to be young and Russian in the post-Soviet world, and his use of the word Paccbet is the embodiment of youthful optimism and the next generation. [Stanley 2016]

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## Рассвет русской молодежной культуры в постсоветскую эпоху: эстетический анализ Гоши Рубчинского

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### Ключевые слова

Гоша Рубчинский, постсоветская молодёжь, Русский дух, уличная мода

Гоша Рубчинский признан на международном уровне, как самый успешный российский дизайнер одежды всех времен. Родившийся в 1984 году в советской Москве, он провел свое детство в годы до и после перестройки и юношество в период хаоса постсоветской России. Построив карьеру в индустрии моды в качестве стилиста в журналах и кино, выпустив дебютную коллекцию под брендом своего имени в 2008 году, который в дальнейшем развился до международного уровня в 2010-е года, Рубчинский произвёл большое впечатление и покориł мировую площадку уличной моды. Его стиль относится к уличной моде, основанной на стиле скейтеров, но главной особенностью является «Русский дух», а также мотивы из советских времен. В данном исследовании рассматривается то, как Рубчинский выражает феномен русскости, сосредотачивая внимание на его подиумных коллекциях и дизайне одежды, а также из его разнообразных творческих работ, включая образы и фотографии Рубчинского. Кроме этого, анализируются причины, по которым казалось бы дизайн, являющийся отечественным, вышел за пределы ориентированности на ограниченное сообщество, стал принят и получил коммерческий успех на международном рынке. А также являющееся почвой этого, сознание нового поколения молодёжи всего мира, которое вышло за барьер России и стран постсоветских времен в открытом глобальном информационном обществе.